

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

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TAGS: PGOV, PINT, FR

SUBJECT: POMPIDOU INTERVIEW ON CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM PROPOSAL

REF: PARIS 27420

1. SUMMARY. INTERVIEWED BY LE POINT DEPUTY CHIEF EDITOR GEORGES SUFFERT ON FRENCH RADIO/TV OCTOBER 24, POMPIDOU PUT HIS PROPOSED CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT (REDUCING PRESIDENTIAL TERM FROM SEVEN TO FIVE YEARS) ON ICE FOR INDEFINITE PERIOD. WHILE POMPIDOU SUFFERED SLIGHT POLITICAL SETBACK IN VOTE ON AMENDMENT (REFTTEL), HE WAS ABLE TO LIMIT EXTENT OF DAMAGE AND EVEN SOMEWHAT TO EMBARRASS CENTRIST AND SOCIALIST OPPOSITION IN INTERVIEW. MIDDLE EAST SITUATION, WHICH HELPED CAUSE SET BACK, AND PRESS STRIKE OCTOBER 25-26 SHOULD DAMPEN CENTRIST PRESS AND OPPOSITION COMMENT ON ISSUE. END SUMMARY.

2. POMPIDOU INTERVIEW EVENING OF OCTOBER 24 CARRIED ON NATION-WIDE RADIO/TV. POMPIDOU EXPLAINED THAT HE HAD HOPED TO GAIN SUPPORT OF ASSEMBLY OPPOSITION (ESPECIALLY SOCIALISTS) FOR HIS PROPOSED AMENDMENT REDUCING PRESIDENTIAL TERM TO FIVE YEARS, SINCE FIVE YEAR MANDATE CONTAINED IN UNITED LEFT PROGRAM. PRESIDENT SAID THAT PRESIDENTIAL

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TERM OF SAME LENGTH AS FOR DEPUTIES WOULD STRENGTHEN

EQUILIBRIUM BETWEEN EXECUTIVE AND LEGISLATIVE BRANCHES, PUTTING PRESIDENT AND DEPUTIES ON EQUAL FOOTING IN REGARD THEIR POPULAR MANDATES, THUS MAKING IT EASIER FOR EACH BRANCH TO COOPERATE.

3. POMPIDOU DENIED HE IS DEPARTING FROM GAULLIST PRINCIPLES IN ATTEMPTING TO REDUCE LENGTH OF TERM. HE SAID THE GENERAL HAD CONSIDERED THAT THE INCARNATED "NATIONAL LEGITIMACY" OF FRANCE SINCE JUNE 18, 1940; THEREFORE, DID NOT ENJOY RUNNING FOR PRESIDENCY. DE GAULLE NEVERTHELESS HAD FOUND IT NECESSARY TO ASSURE PERIODICALLY THAT HE HAD CONFIDENCE OF THE NATION. THROUGH HIS USE OF REFERENDA. IN APRIL 1969, HAVING BEEN DEFEATED IN A REFERENDUM, DE GAULLE RESIGNED. POMPIDOU SAID HE CHOSE THE METHOD OF A JOINT SESSION OF BOTH LEGISLATIVE HOUSES APPROVING THE AMENDMENT RATHER THAN THE REFERENDUM ROUTE (SEE PARA 3 REFTL) BECAUSE HE HAD HOPED THE PRESIDENT AND PARLIAMENT COULD ACT TOGETHER ON A MATTER OF NATIONAL INTEREST, AND THAT WITHIN THE PARLIAMENT BOTH THE MAJORITY AND THE OPPOSITION PARTIES COULD ALSO ACT TOGETHER.

4. POMPIDOU STATED HE WOULD NOT GIVE UP THE AMENDMENT PROPOSAL. SINCE HE MIGHT NOT GET THE REQUIRED 3/5 VOTE IN JOINT "CONGRESS" HE WOULD NOT IMMEDIATELY PRESENT THE PROPOSAL. THE FRENCH HAD ALREADY VOTED A GREAT DEAL THIS YEAR. HE WAS NOT SURE FRENCH VOTER FULLY UNDERSTOOD THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE AMENDMENT, THEREFORE NEITHER WOULD HE IMMEDIATELY SUBMIT THE PROPOSAL TO A REFERENDUM. HOWEVER, HE WAS UNDER NO TIME PRESSURE ON THE AMENDMENT WHICH IN ANY CASE WOULD BE EFFECTIVE ONLY AFTER 1976. HE SAID HE MIGHT WELL DECIDE TO RE-POSE THE CONSTITUTIONAL QUESTION AT TIME OF 1976 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS. ASKED WHETHER HE WOULD HIMSELF RUN AGAIN IN 1976, POMPIDOU SAID THAT HE WAS ALWAYS PREPARED TO PUT HIS CAPACITIES AT THE SERVICE OF FRANCE FOR AS LONG AS THE FRENCH WISHED AND HE WOULD MAKE A DECISION IN 1976.

5. COMMENT: REACTIONS TO THE PRESIDENT'S CONFERENCE FOLLOWED STRICTLY PARTY LINES, THOUGH IT IS WORTHWHILE TO NOTE THAT EVEN THE OPPOSITION FOUND LITTLE OF SUBSTANCE TO CRITICIZE. ALTHOUGH POMPIDOU'S FAILURE TO GET THE NECESSARY MAJORITY LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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IN BOTH HOUSES IS CERTAINLY A SETBACK FOR THE PRESIDENT, HE HAS COME OUT OF IT WELL. IN A SENSE, THE CONTINUING MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT, WHICH IN FACT COST HIM THE AMENDMENT, HAS SAVED HIM NOW FROM THE KIND OF DETAILED PRESS CRITICISM WHICH WOULD HAVE GREETED SETBACK UNDER NORMAL CONDITIONS. A PRESS STRIKE OCTOBER 25/26 WILL ALSO REDUCE CRITICAL COMMENT. BY CRITICISING THE PARLIAMENTARY OPPOSITION FOR VOTING AGAINST A PROPOSAL WHICH THEY HAD THEMSELVES MADE, POMPIDOU PUT THE

CENTRISTS ON THE DEFENSIVE. HE ALSO EMBARRASSED SLIGHTLY
MITTERRAND, THE SOCIALIST LEADER, BY MENTIONING HIM BY NAME
AND SAYING THAT HE HAD HOPED THAT THE SOCIALISTS (THOUGH
NOT THE COMMUNISTS) WOULD VOTE FOR THIS PROPOSAL OR AT
LEAST ABSTAIN. POMPIDOU HAS KEPT ALL HIS OPTIONS OPEN
AND CAN RE-SUBMIT THE AMENDMENT AT ANY TIME. IRWIN

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